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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR WISNER'S FEB 6 VISIT TO BELGRADE

Classified By: Ambassador Michael C. Polt for reasons 1.4(b) & (D)

This cable is being repeated due to network problems.

11. (C) Summary: In his 2/6 meetings in Belgrade, Ambassador Wisner affirmed full USG support for Ahtisaari and his proposal and urged Serbian leaders to commit fully to the UNOSEK negotiations as the Kosovo status process moves into its final stage. President Tadic offered assurances that he would engage "personally" while PM Kostunica was more ambiguous. G17 Plus leader Dinkic appears ready to (only) follow the lead to engage in talks. All leaders said that Serbia would not be able to participate in Kosovo negotiations until parliament convened and granted a mandate to a new team, something they all said would be impossible by Ahtisaari's suggested negotiations beginning the week of 2/13. Wisner also firmly rebuffed hints at partition from Dinkic and even some progressive Serbs at lunch, reaffirming complete USG support for Contact Group principles against the partition, saying it would "extinguish Serbian life" in Kosovo. End Summary.

President Tadic

12. (C) President Tadic was calm, self-assured and well-prepared, closely following a written script. Though the meeting was entirely about Kosovo, the President framed his remarks in the context of his commitment to moving Serbia forward to closer integration with NATO and the EU -- something he called a "strategic imperative" for his country. He thanked the USG for our help on the PfP decision, which he called an "extremely important boost" helping to achieve the best ever result for the DS in parliamentary elections. He said he was committed to forming a government that would include all democratic parties, even if some parties had vowed not to work together. As soon as a government was formed he would move Serbia closer to NATO. The DS would be the dominant player in a new government with the right priorities: peace, a reform orientation, full cooperation with ICTY, and quick Euro-Atlantic integration.

13. (C) On Kosovo negotiations on the Ahtisaari plan, Tadic said that as President he would insist that Serbia be "totally engaged" with a negotiating team that had "renewed legitimacy." He then proceeded to lay out the next steps for moving forward: rerun of elections in six polling stations by the end of the week, quick completion of other technical and legal requirements for constituting a new parliament (which he suggested could be done as early as February 12), a decision by parliament to either confirm or reappoint the

negotiating team, and finally debate in the parliament of the Ahtisaari proposal that would define the platform for Serbia in Vienna.

14. (C) Tadic said that the current caretaker government did not have a mandate to engage in negotiations and that the current negotiating team was "legally dissolved." He said he believed that the parties had all expressed to him their full support for engaging in Vienna and he did not believe they would put up any roadblocks in convening parliament or in the ensuing debate on the proposal. He thought the Radicals would not seek to join the team but he acknowledged that other parties, including Milosevic's Socialist party, had requested to be represented. The Radicals, he surmised, only wanted a chance to make a statement in parliament. In response to Wisner's question about whether he would be personally engaged, Tadic did not hesitate: "Serbia will participate and I will participate; I need your country's support on this." That said, in reaffirming his public stance that the independence of Kosovo was unacceptable to him, Tadic did not offer a way to square his equally unequivocal commitment to the Euro-Atlantic relationship with Kosovo solution rejection.

15. (C) Wisner acknowledged the historical importance of the moment and the complicated decision that he faced. He affirmed the common views in Washington that strong US-Serbia relations are a high priority and that Tadic has the talent and determination to secure the best for Serbia's future. He told Tadic that he had fully understood his plan for moving forward on Kosovo talks and supported it. Wisner then reviewed the Ahtisaari proposal, describing its different parts, noting our strong support and collaboration, and highlighting its value and importance in "settling the Kosovo

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problem" and opening the door to the right kind of relationship between Serbia and the USG.

16. (C) Tadic raised some troubling reports he had received about Albanian extremists in Kosovo and the threat they posed to stability and to moving forward in the negotiations. Wisner said that the international community had carefully considered all the contingencies and explained how that thinking had translated into the proposal, i.e. the four month UNMIK transition period, the roles for NATO and the ESPD element on the police side, and the international civilian office. Some of these reports were politically inspired scare talk and not fully reflective of the reality on the ground: he asked Tadic to carefully evaluate the information he was receiving to distinguish which was which. Wisner said the USG expected that Tadic would use all of the services/authority at his disposal to separate rumor from reality and to do everything to maintain calm and prevent problems. Wisner urged Tadic to keep an "open line" between his CHOD and COMKFOR, which Tadic assured was also his priority.

Prime Minister Kostunica

17. (C) The Prime Minister was far more ambiguous about how long the delay might be and completely dodged repeated questions about how Serbia would engage in Vienna. While there was no specific request for a postponement of the 2/13 date for the next Vienna round, there was a clear suggestion that a short postponement was needed. Kostunica began the discussion noting new developments in Serbia "Constitution and elections" followed by an uncharitable and inaccurate characterization of the Ahtisaari proposal. He said that Ahtisaari had overstepped his mandate by taking away a part of Serbia's territory and ignoring international law; he complained about the way in which Ahtisaari had structured the negotiations and the few opportunities that Belgrade had been given to discuss the status issue. The Prime Minister

again referred to the Badinter report, noting that Ahtisaari had ignored it entirely with the proposal's unambiguous support for independence. That the plan does not mention independence "means nothing" and said it would be "a tautology" to have included such a reference. Kostunica proclaimed that the entire Ahtisaari proposal had nothing to do with the Vienna negotiations and it does not resemble "an outcome" of those talks.

¶8. (C) Wisner responded to each point challenging the Prime Minister's arguments and refuting his characterization of a complicated process that Ahtisaari had managed with care, transparency and integrity. He said Ahtisaari's proposal "stems directly" from the negotiations on all matters on all negotiated issues between the sides. Wisner clarified that arrangements between international bodies such as the UN, EU, and NATO were up to the concerned bodies. If there were details that had been decided without full consideration of Serbia's position, it was not for want of trying but a result of Serbia's uneven engagement.

¶9. (C) Kostunica reviewed the discussions from Tadic's meeting yesterday with all political parties. He said it was clear that the competencies of the negotiating team had expired and that his caretaker government was only authorized to deal with technical issues. It was essential that the Serb parliament consider the Ahtisaari proposal, confirm and/or appoint a new negotiating team and debate the proposal and establish a platform for negotiating in Vienna. The follow up negotiations could only be managed in the context of Serbia's constitutional and political requirements, not under the threat of a time line. Serbia had moved forward in a number of important ways: with a new constitution, with parliamentary elections, and was now in the midst of a process that would not take so long, months at the most.

¶10. (C) Wisner pressed him on his thoughts on how Serbia might engage in Vienna beyond the constitutional and technical difficulties. Kostunica complained about the proposal, distinguishing between the annexes, which dealt with practical issues and the first part of the proposal which suggested independence. He complained about the arbitrary way in which the two parts had been combined and presented, so quickly after elections. In fact, Kostunica called it "strange" that Ahtisaari had decided to postpone

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presenting his proposal until after Serbian elections "with no consultations with us," going so far as to say, "if a country is about to be deprived of 15% of its territory, it should be known before elections." Ahtisaari must be "patient" and wait for a new parliamentary mandate, the Prime Minister continued, "otherwise it looks like blackmail."

¶11. (C) Wisner pressed again for his vision of the road ahead and how we could get back to the business of building Serbia's future. Kostunica was vague and rambling. He said that the Contact Group and Security Council would have to decide (presumably about a delay) and that ultimately it would have to decide between independence and autonomy. Kostunica said things were not so clear. Kosovo, the Prime Minister insisted, was not only a question of territorial integrity but national integrity and state dignity. Serbia had to be treated fairly and with justice.

¶12. (C) Wisner reviewed the next steps that Ahtisaari had outlined for the parties leading up to his recommendation to the Security Council in New York and consideration of a resolution; he encouraged Serbia to engage on specific issues. Wisner told him that there are no strict deadlines but our sense of the calendar was that things could move to New York as early as March. The Kosovo status process is going into the final round and Serbia should move to act responsibly and engage. Kostunica closed by noting that the serious obstacle was in convening parliament over the next several days. This might require at the most ten days.

¶13. (C) The outgoing Finance Minister and leader of the kingmaker G17 Plus, Mladjan Dinkic showed himself to be very new to the nuts and bolts of the Kosovo negotiations. Other than a few cursory and disjointed concerns about the Ahtisaari plan, Dinkic preferred to stick to the general agreement of the parties born out of their 2/5 meeting with Tadic. He also predicted that the GOS would not be ready for talks on 2/13.

¶14. (C) Dinkic said that he and "his pro-EU party" were disappointed by the Ahtisaari plan but that Serbia should work to negotiate and amend it rather than "fight the document." In general, he thinks the Ahtisaari proposal "worsens Serbia's position" because there are "not enough guarantees" for Kosovo Serbs. He raised issue with financial ties between Serb municipalities and the GOS, church protections and debt issues. Specifically, Dinkic was concerned with "Kosovo government approval" for financial transfers between Kosovo Serb municipalities and the GOS. However, he said he "understands the logic" that an independent Kosovo should have a say over financial ties outside its borders.

¶15. (C) Wisner thanked Dinkic for his engagement and urged him to "take his concerns to Vienna and negotiate." Reaffirming USG support of the UNOSEK plan, Wisner responded to Dinkic's specific points qualifying that his views could clarify the logic of the provisions but that the details would have to be raised in Vienna. On financial transfers, Wisner explained that the plan assured to Serb municipalities unhindered financial ties and simply required both sides -- the receiving municipality and the granting GOS entity -- to inform Pristina, stressing the importance of this kind of transparency for a host of reasons including facilitating assistance. On church protection, Wisner agreed it was of supreme importance and urged Dinkic to speak with deputy Special Envoy Rohan. On debt, Wisner told Dinkic the plan would be "fair and sustainable" to both parties. In sum, Wisner called the Ahtisaari plan the "best package in Europe" for a minority community and the basis for a multi-ethnic state.

¶16. (C) Dinkic ended by hinting at partition, describing the two possible outcomes as either imposed with current borders or "a compromise" protecting Serbia's strategic interests. Wisner was unambiguous in his response and averred the Contact Group would not budge from its principles on the matter. "The best way to avoid Pandora's Box is not to open it," Wisner said.

Lunch with Opinion Leaders

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¶17. (SBU) A split amongst even progressive Serbs on partition was apparent at a lunch hosted by the Ambassador for Wisner. Former Djindjic advisor (and possible DS candidate for Foreign Minister) Ivan Vejvoda was joined by former Deputy PM Miroljub Labus and incoming LDP MP Vesna Pesic in probing the partition question. Vejvoda noted a "buzz" on the issue. Labus asked if it is not time to "accept reality" in Kosovo and accept that "Belgrade does not control Pristina and Pristina does not control the north." Pesic opined it would be worthwhile to "relax border rigidity" to avoid destabilization and raised the prospect of delaying a UN seat for Kosovo. Businessman Slobodan Vucicevic, who runs factories in all the former Yugoslav republics and does business in Kosovo, said that the "fragile democratic majority" might not survive independence and there would be "clarity through partition." Conversely, former Foreign Minister Goran Svilanovic thought the plan was "not a bad

deal" for Kosovo Serbs but that a UN seat could be withheld until public opinion was "prepared." Correspondent for Danas Jelena Bjelica said that as a Serb living in Pristina, she was firmly against partition since it would jeopardize peace and abandon the enclaves. She noted that many Kosovo Serbs are taking steps to integrate -- several Serbian parties are now registered in Pristina through the OSCE.

¶18. (SBU) Wisner firmly laid down a marker on partition, saying it would "extinguish Serbian life" in Kosovo. He called the Ahtisaari plan the "best chance for stability and for the Kosovo Serb population." Wisner was direct in his response to the idea of holding a UN seat in abeyance, repudiating the strategy as one "aimed to deprive and punish" the Kosovars rather than one based on a sincere aim to stabilize.

¶19. (C) Comment: Mission accomplished so far. The Serbs are engaging, even if not to find a way to accept Kosovo independence. Kostunica's non-engagement strategy backfired. Tadic got lucky and looks presidential and statesmanlike for now. In fairness to him, he also played his cards pretty well in this instance. Public opinion so far can hardly be described in the cataclysmic terms predicted by Kostunica and other more strident nationalists. The lesson so far is we are on the right track to move ahead to closure quickly while capitalizing on the relatively muted response to the Ahtisaari plan. End Comment.

¶20. (U) Ambassador Wisner cleared this message after departing post.
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